(d)   contacting the service provider in response to the authentication of the smart card and said service provider identification data and sending a second message to the service provider, said second message containing set-top box identification data;

(e)   receiving from the service provider, in response to said second message, a second digital certificate encrypted using a second private key of said service provider;

(f)   receiving from the service provider said second message encrypted using a third private key;

(g)   authenticating the service provider in response to said second digital certificate and said second encrypted message;

(h)   providing confirmation of the authentication to the service provider; and

(i)   establishing a communication channel with the service provider in response to the authenticated service provider.

12.   The method [system] of Claim 11 wherein the smart card comprises a plurality of digital certificates, each one containing service provider identification data associated with a unique service provider.

13.   The method [system] of Claim 12 wherein the step of authenticating the smart card in response to said first digital certificate comprises decrypting said first digital certificate in said set-top box using a first public key.

14.   The method [system] of Claim 13 wherein said second digital certificate comprises second service provider identification data and a second public key of said service provider.

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15.   The <u>method</u> [system] of Claim 14 wherein the step of authenticating the service provider comprises the steps of:

       (a)   decrypting said second digital certificate in the set-top box using said second public key;

       (b)   decrypting said encrypted second message using a third public key to generate a second decrypted message; and

       (c)   comparing said second decrypted message to said second message.

16.   The <u>method</u> [system] of Claim 15 wherein said first public key, said second public key, said first message and said second message are stored in said set-top box.

17.   The <u>method</u> [system] of Claim 16 wherein said first digital certificate, said first private key and said first public key are issued by an independent certificate authority.

18.   The <u>method</u> [system] of Claim 17 wherein said first digital certificate is stored in said smart card.

19.   The <u>method</u> [system] of Claim 18 wherein said second digital certificate, said second private key and said second public key are issued by an independent certificate authority and are associated with said service provider.

20.   The <u>method</u> [system] of Claim 19 wherein said second digital certificate is stored in said service provider.